

## John Calvin Rediscovered: The Impact of His Social and Economic Thought

**Edward Dommen and James D. Bratt (Editors)**

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007 (161 pages)

This succinct anthology seeks to trace certain rediscoveries of Calvin's impact on socio-economic matters, primarily focusing on two geopolitical venues: the West and the non-West. For those in the democratic West, of course, Calvin has been rediscovered numerous times before, and as we approach the quincentenary of his birth in 2009, there will likely be multiple rediscoveries over the coming months. Some of those rediscoveries will advance our understanding of Calvin; others may be more reflective of current or past interests in the West.

Part 1 of this volume, which is part of The Princeton Theological Seminary Studies in Reformed Theology and History series, focuses on Calvin and His Age. Featured essays include (1) an overview of Calvin's teaching on socioeconomic issues by Elsie Ann McKee, (2) Robert Kingdon's survey (and call for renewal) of the instrumental value of church discipline for moral reform, (3) François Dermange's essay on Calvin and property (which helpfully assembles many of Calvin's glosses from his Old Testament commentaries), (4) an exploration by Edward Dommen seeking to show how interested Calvin was in the environment and sustainable development, and (5) Eberhard Busch's survey of how Calvin's social and economic thought was received.

Part 2 proceeds to focus on the spread of Calvinism in its global influence. Coeditor James D. Bratt provides an introduction to Abraham Kuyper, who in this chapter appears (along with Calvin) to be a little more communitarian than some interpreters have previously noted. Also in this section are two helpful essays on Calvin's global influence in Latin America and Korea. Eduardo Galasso Faria provides an interesting assessment of Calvin's impact in Latin America, beginning with the first Calvinistic colony in Brazil in 1555, and Seong-Won Park surveys Calvin's impact in Korea. Christoph Stuckelberger completes this section with a review of the impact of Weber (the putative megaphone for Calvin) in Asia.

Readers will appreciate Robert Kingdon's study of how Calvin's consistory helped resolve disputes, and Elsie McKee helpfully notes that "social and economic matters are not an addendum to the worship of God; they are part and parcel of right earthly worship" (21). Furthermore, readers are informed as to how strongly Calvin "oppose[d] any direct relation between theology and politics ... because the texts are not in themselves normative" (44). It may require, however, additional proof to persuade some audiences that Calvin was "less interested in ensuring the safety of property against the envy of others or in showing its social usefulness than in defining the duties of the wealthy in relation to the poor" (48) or that Calvin's "sole concern [in these matters] was to improve the actual situation of the poor" (51). Nor may it immediately appear to be axiomatic that Calvinism, once implanted in other soils in history, always or only produces either a

preferential option for the poor or the use of wealth that is more concerned with societal cumulative value than individual enhancement.

Also helpful are Christoph Stuckelberger's recommendations on how to spread the influence of Calvin's economic thinking. Included among his suggestions are: dependence on Calvin as an original source (think of this perhaps as *ad fontes redivivus*) instead of on Weber as more definitive; avoidance of monocausal or simplistic explanations; and the production of more accurate translations in new cultures.

On the theme of translations (and the inherent difficulties involved), the final part of this book includes two helpful essays on the mechanics of translating Calvin. Edward Dommen's chapter on rendering Calvin into English well demonstrates the challenge and complexity of translation. In addition, Peter Opitz's chapter on translating Calvin into German, seeking in the main to explore the various connotations (not to mention the equivocalities) of "doctrine" and "religion," made his point too.

This book will serve as a useful supplement to the standard in this field (Andre Bieler's *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*). This reviewer especially appreciated some of the more helpful studies from part 2, written by first-time rediscoverers. If this volume aids in that heuristic process, it will make a welcome contribution not only to scholarship but also to various communities of faith and life.

—David W. Hall

*Calvin500.org, Powder Springs, Georgia*

## Incorrectly Political: Augustine and Thomas More

**Peter Iver Kaufman**

Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press,  
2007 (279 pages)

Although their lives were separated by eleven centuries, Augustine and Thomas More faced similar ecclesiastical and political dilemmas during their public careers. Augustine lived during the era between Constantine's conversion to Christianity and Rome's collapse when he was forced to grapple with the difficult issues raised by the new faith's impact on a declining empire. More lived during the first decades of the Reformation era, attaining the high office of Lord Chancellor to King Henry VIII, which he used to champion the prerogatives of the Roman Catholic Church against the anticlerical reformers in England. Both lived in times of transition. Indeed, conventional history has long held that the two eras frame the entire millennium known as the medieval era.

In the current volume, the prolific Peter Iver Kaufman, professor of history and religious studies at the University of North Carolina, has written an engaging historical account of the careers of these two pivotal Christian figures, focusing on the lessons they learned and would pass down to subsequent generations. Not quite a comparative analysis, the author devotes four chapters to Augustine and three to More, weaving in succession the fascinating stories of their lives and times. Though histories are often told